

MENINGITIS, aseptic and bacterial

What is meningitis?

Meningitis is a medical term that refers to **an inflammation of the membranes that cover the brain and spinal cord (meninges)**. Two closely related terms are meningoencephalitis, which refers to an inflammation of the brain and the meninges, and encephalomyelitis, which refers to an inflammation of the brain and spinal cord.

Meningitis can be caused by a number of viruses and bacteria. **Aseptic meningitis** describes the situation where the meningitis is caused by a virus. **Bacterial meningitis** describes the situation where the meningitis is caused by a bacteria.

What are the symptoms of meningitis?

The symptoms of meningitis vary depending on the cause of the meningitis. The central nervous system effects can be very mild and produce symptoms no worse than a headache, or they can be very severe and result in coma or death. Depending on the cause of the meningitis, other body systems may also be affected.

Aseptic meningitis is usually a mild illness, and rarely lasts longer than 10 days. Patients with aseptic meningitis almost always have a complete recovery from their illness. Bacterial meningitis is almost always a very serious disease, and patients with this condition may suffer from permanent brain damage due to their illness.

Why is meningitis considered a reportable disease?

Meningitis, especially bacterial meningitis, is a rare but very serious disease. Many of the causes of meningitis are communicable and, if one case of meningitis is diagnosed within a community, appropriate steps may need to be taken immediately to prevent the further spread of the disease.

Where can I get more information?

- Your personal doctor.
- Your local health department listed in your telephone directory.
- The Utah Department of Health, Bureau of Epidemiology (801) 538-6191.

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